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& Raptor Conservation Magazine

The 3rd
International
Festival of
Falconry



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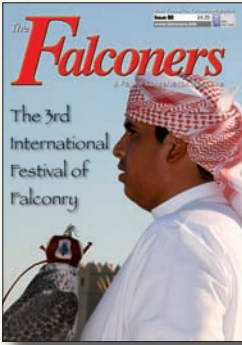
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Doesn't time fly? It was a year ago when we were up to our knees in snow and at the time of writing the weather is crisp and dry – good time to be out hawking.

In this issue there is a lengthy article (or rather two articles) on the 3rd Festival of Falconry held in December in Abu Dhabi and my thanks go to Joe and Cordi Atkinson for writing about their time in the desert camp.

On the subject of articles, my thanks must also go to Yvonne Taylor for her continued support and excellent writing including in this issue her time with the Northumberland Crow Falcons.

This year the Falconers' Fair will be held at Althorp in Nottinghamshire.

This was the original home of the fair and it's good to know that we can go back there. Thanks go to Earl Spencer for allowing the fair to be put on once again at his stately home.

In the meantime, have a good read.

editorial



news

a review of what's new in our sport Send all your news and product information to peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

New roles at the Hawk Conservancy Trust

After many years, the responsibility of running the daily business of the Trust, by Ashley Smith, is changing. Ashley will assume the title of Executive Life President and will become the elder statesman - always available with his vast store of knowledge and expertise to assist the Trust's team.

The Trust is fortunate in his successor as Chief Executive in finding Penny Smout, an Oxford graduate with a string of successful business experiences behind her both in America and the UK. She has a BA, MSc. and MBA with over 15 years of experience in management and marketing both as an



entrepreneur and in major corporations. She has designed and won numerous strategy and marketing projects including a major investment project of \$16 million. She is committed, analytical, highly intelligent and has a passionate interest in taking the Trust forward to an even higher level of international excellence.

Penny is wholeheartedly supported by her husband, Don, who works at the University of Southampton and her young son, Toby, who is already demanding to become a volunteer at the age of eight! The Trust looks forward to a long and happy relationship and wish her every success in her new role.



The Falconry Weekend

I will endeavour to un-confuse you! Read on! Firstly the British Falconry Fair is moving venue – back to Althorp where it originally started, and on 6-7 May which is the May Bank Holiday weekend as usual. It will be good to be back at its original home, and what a place. So don't go to Ragley or Chetwynd, come to Althorp.

Next - the UK Falconry Club and the International Centre for Birds of Prey last year ran the superb UK Falconry Event at the ICBP Newent on September 3rd and 4th 2011. The weather was great, the venue second to none, the stands were all good and most did very well and had a successful weekend. The seminars were well attended. The dog demonstration on the Sunday done by Howard Kirby was brilliant, he

stepped in at the last minute and we all enjoyed his work enormously. The flying demonstrations were just amazing, Nigel King's Aplomado Falconry was lovely to watch, Gary Biddiss did his usual excellent demonstrations with his Merlin Peregrine and his beautiful female Peregrine, he also showed us the start of training birds to Kite work. Because it was held at the Centre my staff and I had a huge choice of birds to fly and I have to say none let us down, they all flew superbly. The Steller's Sea Eagle was singularly impressive! Most importantly of all the atmosphere was wonderful.

The Centre has a reputation for having a friendly and special atmosphere and it carried over into the Falconry Event that weekend. The

comments afterwards reflected all the above.

So is a falconry weekend happening again at the Centre – YES

- is it happening here, YES
- is it the same weekend (this year Sept 1st and 2nd) YES
- is it the same format, YES but even better we plan!
- Will it be good weather – not a clue!
- Is it a joint event with the UK Falconry Club NO
- Is it the same name, NO that would be wrong of us to take, as it was shared

For various reasons that really do not need to be aired publicly, the UK Falconry Club decided that among other things they would like their Event,



instead of being here, to move around the country, to allow dogs in, and people to be able to bring birds. As a result we are running our event here and they are running theirs, i.e. TWO different falconry shows. Theirs is called the UK Falconry and Hawking Event and is at Norton near Evesham on August 11th and 12th – the glorious 12th as it were. Ours is called THE FALCONRY WEEKEND and will be at ICBP Newent on Sept 1st and 2nd.

None of these shows are competing and none are at the same time.

For veterinary health reasons we can't allow all and sundry to bring birds, only those who are officially demonstrating. We are actually not legally allowed to bring together a whole load of birds without a special license anyway, under Animal Health rules. Similarly apart from my own dogs whom our 250 birds are used to, I can't allow dogs, and quite frankly dragging dogs around show grounds never strikes me as much fun for the dogs anyway. Plus I don't want to have to clear up afterwards, unlike most shows, this is not a field that goes back to being a field afterwards, this is a carefully tended huge garden with the public

walking and picnicking in it almost year round.

So - the UK Falconry Club is going to run its own show at Norton near Evesham in August, and it is in a field outside the village I believe. I and all at the ICBP would like to wish them the best of luck with their Event.

So now there are TWO new shows as well as the British Falconry Fair, which can only be good for falconry. We falconers have always been envied by the rest of the field sport community because we have promoted our sport better than anyone else, and by doing these sorts of things we continue to do exactly that. Ours is called The Falconry Weekend, and if all goes to plan it will happen on a yearly basis at ICBP on the last weekend of the summer holidays.

I hope you will join us on 1-2 September this year (2012) I can't promise great weather, but if all goes well I can promise good stands, and a greater variety this year. Kiezerbrink is sponsoring The Falconry Weekend. Bob Dalton and Diana Durman Walters and Neil Forbes are giving seminars, among others. We have fly tying and casting demonstrations using our pond and hopefully good landing nets to buy for catching up birds in aviaries. There

will be others flying birds, we will keep you up to date as and when we know. We will be flying Merlins this year, as well as various other falcons, hawks and eagles. So it only remains for the stands to book up with us, some have already said they are coming, and for you to put the dates in your diaries.

Our website is:
www.thefalconryweekend.com
there will be stuff on it by the end of January. For the other shows google the UK Falconry Club event for their website, and the British Falconry Fair for theirs.

I hope this has un confused you and we hope to see many of you here in September as The Falconry Weekend will be the culminating event for us in 2012 to celebrate our 45th anniversary as a dedicated bird of prey centre, making us the oldest dedicated bird of prey centre in the world. And we are proud of it and look forward to sharing it with you.

Any businesses who would like a stand at The Falconry Weekend drop me an email at jpp@icbp.org and I will email you a Stand-holders pack.

For those wishing just to visit keep an eye on the website as things go up.

Jemima Parry-Jones

3rd FESTIVAL of FALCONRY

The 3rd International Festival of Falconry was held 15-17 December 2011 and the venue was the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This festival was jointly organised between the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) and International

Wildlife Consultants (IWC) under the directorship of Dr. Nick Fox and the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Although this was the third festival, the Emirates billed it as the second festival, having the first one in UAE back in 1976. This did cause a bit of confusion among

the falconry visitors at the time but an explanation about the earlier event was given later – the first one was more of a conference than anything else.

I was lucky enough to attend the festival which was based in the Al Jahili Fort, Al Ain, which is about 80 miles south of Abu Dhabi and as at the previous two festivals held near Reading, there were many countries being represented – in fact over 70 countries in all.

A large group of falconers from Britain attended the event and most stayed in the Hilton Hotel, Al Ain, which was about five to six minutes coach ride from the Jahili Fort and we were very well looked after by the staff. It was a bit surreal with clear blue skies, 29° heat in the afternoon and Christmas decorations being put up!



Roger Upton speaking at the opening ceremony

The Desert Camp

The festival was held in a number of parts. Firstly, the desert camp which operated over four days – this was over a one hour coach ride from Al Ain. This was set up to collect and collate all the birds that were to go to the main venue and was for falconers only and not open to the general public. There, many of the hawks and falcons were manned and practising for some of the main arena events was also done. Some of these hawks were kindly lent to the festival by Al Ain Zoo.

One aspect of training a falcon which caught many people's eye was the use of a radio-controlled aircraft with a lure attached to it. Unlike many lures used in this country (kite or balloon) the aircraft could fly in every direction and at every height, speed and distance to make the falcon work as hard as the person controlling the aircraft wanted.

There was also the opportunity to stay at the camp in army tents and catch up with old friends and make new



Alan Gates, Dr. Anotoliy Levin and Dr. Nick Fox having a chat in the desert camp

ones from all over the globe.

Another opportunity on offer was to go hawking in the desert on camel back – an activity which proved very popular. This was something I decided I didn't want to take part in as I had seen many of the falconers returning much the worse for wear (especially the men) after having been on a camel for 3-4 hours. Ouch!

About five minutes drive from the camp was a number of activities which could only be viewed as a spectator. These were camel racing, saluki racing and falcon racing. I spoke to a few people who had managed to view a couple of these events and, as I understand it, the saluki racing was particularly manic.

As told to me by Dave and Jean Dimond, who were the Welsh representatives, the salukis were shown a live gazelle and then it was hidden from view whereupon a dummy gazelle was brought out which was attached to a vehicle and was driven down the track with the dogs in hot pursuit. The dogs were not the only thing that was going at a rapid pace of knots – the saluki owners were also chasing them in their 4x4s and it was a wonder that nobody was hurt.

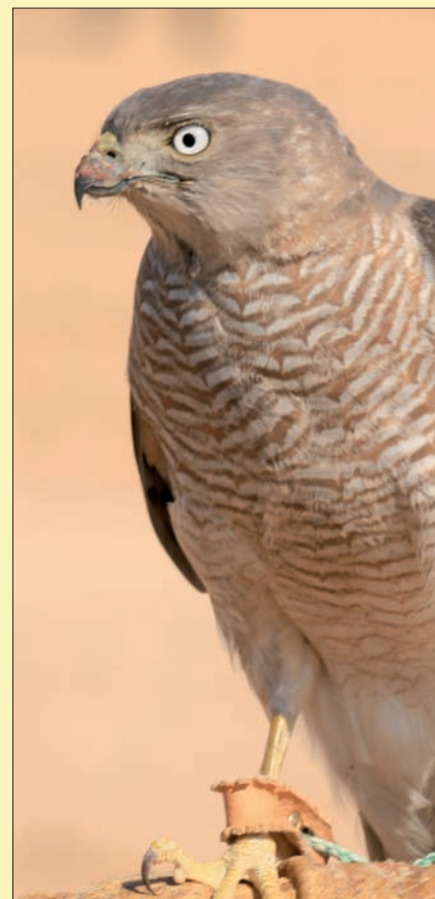
On 14 December the camp was broken up and everything was taken to the main event site at the Jahili Fort ready for the festival being held over the next three days.

Opening ceremony

On the morning of 15 December there was the official opening of the festival and conference held in the Hotel Rotana (which was a few minutes walk away from the fort). This was attended by many falconers and delegates as well as many of the press and TV stations filming the ceremony. The large conference room was packed and we saw a couple of short films, one showing footage from the other festivals which were held in England and the other showing local falconers practising their sport in the desert.

The festival was officially opened by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Katalin Bogay, Hungary's ambassador to UNESCO and special guest Roger Upton who has had a long association with Arab falconry for many years – in fact since the early 1960's.

A group of falconers from various countries of the world paraded into



White Eyed Shikra



A Gyr Falcon brings nations together

the hall each carrying a hawk, falcon or eagle, to be greeted by a great round of applause and the press clamoring to get that extra special shot on camera.

Conference

The International Association for Falconry (IAF) held their annual conference at the event and I hope to bring you a report of that event in a future edition of The Falconers Magazine. The IAF delegates came from all over the world and it was good to see so many of them and meet up with old friends again.

Also, there was a conference entitled "Opportunity to exchange expertise and knowledge" featuring many falconers and health experts. Over the three days there were different talks given in three conference rooms at the hotel. On the first day there was Raptor Health, First Aid and Re-habilitation, Falconry Heritage, Falconry and Pest Control and UNESCO Action Plans for Falconry. The second day consisted of Raptor



Mother and daughter admire falcon



Local falconers going on a hunting trip

Conservation Projects by Falconers, Teaching the Falconer and Legal Controls on Falconry trade, possession, use and conservation benefit. The last day was Management of Quarry and Sustainable Hunting, Managing the Public Image of Falconry and Communication Between Falconers, at which I was one of the speakers. The session that I was speaking at – “Communication between falconers” – started with Jevgeni Shergalin talking about an audit of world falconry. Jevgeni seems to have been given the job of compiling an audit of how many falconers there are in the world, whether they are

professional or amateur, and which aspect they work in (falconry centre, landfill clearance, etc). Good luck with that one, Jevgeni.

Then Bob Dalton spoke on his magazine (World of Falconry) followed by me talking about this publication. It was the first time I have ever had to give a Powerpoint talk and have never been so nervous. Still, I got through it okay (I think)! Then Terry Anthony spoke on how his magazine (International Falconer) is going digital.

Dr. Andrew Dixon was next talking about the publication Falco which is

a magazine of the Middle East Falcon Research Group (MEFRG) and is aimed at veterinarians, biologists and conservationists. Falco is not only published in English but also has a section that has been translated into Arabic – at a cost.

Next came Gary Timbrell, press officer for the IAF. His talk was an explanation of communication between the IAF and falconers and the need for liaising between falconers and governments.

One criticism I have of this part of the conference is that there were too many talks being given at the same time in different conference halls meaning that people had to choose which to attend when they were interested in more than one.

The Festival

As already stated, the main event took place in the Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain. The building work to this fort started in 1891 and was finished in 1898 and what a backdrop it was.

The major point of the festival was that it was a celebration honouring the culture and heritage of falconry. This is something that no falconer should forget – 4000 years of hunting and flying with birds of prey is not an item for a museum!

As before, there were the many ‘camps’ or tents of over 70 different countries taking part, some countries were sharing with neighbouring countries whilst other countries had their own ‘camp’. The USA and Canada, for instance, had a tepee each and the Mongolian and Kazakhs had yurts within the Steppe village. With a national flag flying outside all of the tents of the countries that were being represented it was a very colourful sight to see.

The national camps were set out in a semi-circular fashion around the fort and were, where possible, put together in groups such as the Balkan countries, Eastern European and Southern countries, the Asian and Far Eastern countries and Middle European countries all close to each other.

Another aspect of the festival was an area of marquees dedicated to conservation and art. The conservation tents covered subjects such as rehabilitation and different conservation projects from around the world, including

a tent from our own Hawk Conservancy Trust manned by Ashley Smith and Andy Hinton. There was also an exhibition of the work being undertaken by David Waters on the Great Bustard Group project and an exhibit concerned with dogs and falconry. The latter being presided over by Allan Hender and Diana Durham-Walters.

The Heritage marquee contained a great many exhibits and you could talk to some of the many experts in that field including Peter Devers and Kent Carnie from USA as well as our own David Horobin whose knowledge of the history of falconry is second-to-none.

Another aspect that falconers from around the world enjoy is art and photography and we were not disappointed with what was on show at this festival. A photographic and art competition was held with various categories including preservation of nature, human relationship between the falconer and his bird, sculpture (any three

dimensional artwork), and best work for the under 18 year-olds.

Another major aspect was the inclusion of a family programme which was held in the families and education marquee under the control of James Robinson (Hawk Conservancy Trust) and Terri Bailey who has lived and worked in UAE with her husband Tom for a few years.

There were, of course, also stands for traders, selling anything from locally made items to falconry equipment, artwork and telemetry. Something for everyone was on sale and there was no excuse for not picking up a present for a loved one before the return journey home.

The main arena

As you would expect, the arena flying displays were interesting and varied given by many falconers from all corners of the world. Unfortunately, I didn't get to see as many of these as I would have liked but I did get to witness the wonderful

Chinese falconer Wu Di training a White Eyed Shikra, which was also trained by Jim and Angie Chick at the desert camp. Wu Di has many years of experience as a falconer and it was a privilege to watch him in action. His gentleness and precision was something to admire. The hawk was caught in UAE and was released back into the wild after the festival had finished.

When I arrived at the festival site on the last day, my eyes caught sight of something in the sky and when I looked up I could see a pair of Bonelli's Eagles circling overhead, probably curious to have a look at what was going on at the fort. They held my attention for quite a while and I was very glad to have seen these impressive eagles on the wing in their natural environment.

Commentary for the main arena events was given by Jim Chick and he coped well with having to speak slower than usual on the last day as his words were also being relayed through an



Chinese falconer Wu Di with White Eyed Shikra



The parade of nations on the final day

interpreter. The first two days a couple of media people were helping out in the commentary box reading from a typed script as no interpreter was on hand.

Another aspect of the Middle Eastern life is horsemanship. This was showcased by a demonstration which not only involved riding but also the ability to make the horse lay down on the ground – this showed the trust and respect needed between horse and rider. We were also treated to a display where the riders were using lances to spear into polystyrene blocks at a gallop and this was something that was a crowd-pleaser both for its spectacle and drama. However, I do wonder why this demonstration was needed as it was a falconry event after all.

Another excellent display involved a Golden Eagle flying from the commentary box to a lure which was pulled by a horse rider from Kazakhstan assisted by Andrew Knowles-Brown who made-in to collect the eagle from the lure at the end. This was another demonstration which

had the crowd cheering especially when at one point the eagle decided to have a quick fly at Andrew before going to the lure.

The final event was a parade of nations and what a colourful spectacle it was. Representatives from every nation present entered the arena carrying their national flag and most were dressed in national costume. The parade was co-ordinated by Terry Large, who was also on hand at the desert camp arranging the hunting parties and what an excellent job he did.

Thank you

I would like to publicly thank the hard working organisers for giving me the opportunity to attend the event.

It was a great festival and I look forward to the next one which, it was announced after the parade, will be held in two years time (2013) also in the UAE.

Right: Part of the future of falconry



The Desert Camp

Sometimes your life can take completely unexpected turns and being asked to go to the Third International Festival of Falconry in Al Ain in the UAE to train eagles as a member of the Eagle Team is what dreams are made of, especially if you are a life long falconer. The Eagle Team or, as we preferred to be called, “The Magnificent Seven”, was a group of eagle falconers selected from all over the globe. I would be remiss if I did not give them their just due and mention them by name. So, in an effort to give them their five seconds of fame here they are: Andrew Knowles-Brown

(Scotland), our team leader, Alan Rothery (Scotland), Daniel Kohlmann (Germany), Calvin Crossman (England), Lauren McGough (USA), Chase Delles (USA), and myself (USA). But let me say it was my pleasure to work with them. Their skill and compassion for the eagles was exceptional.

A collection of eagles

Our job was to handle a varied group of eagles assembled for the festival and the desert camp was going to be our training field. The list of eagles included two Steppe Eagles, a Spotted Eagle, a Short Toed Eagle, a Bonelli Eagle, an African

Fish Eagle, a White Tailed Sea Eagle, four Golden Eagles and one Imperial eagle. This group of eagles ranged greatly regarding how much or how little they had been worked with. Some eagles had been doing flying displays at the Al Ain Zoo or as part of a Bird of Prey Show in Dubai while others had not been handled at all and required total manning from square one. The vast majority of the eagles would only be required to sit and behave themselves hooded on the fist, but several were going to be included in flight displays during country presentations at the festival. All of these eagles were going to be in our care for



Andrew Knowles-Brown, Joe Atkinson, Lauren McGough and Chase Delles in the desert



Eating in traditional Arab style

three weeks which meant they needed to be fed on the fist and learn to accept the hood as a part of their daily routine. All eagles were weighed daily and food amounts were given according to what the scale revealed. All flying eagles were fitted with Marshall tail mounts and were, for obvious reasons, always flown with a Marshall transmitter clipped on the tail.

Having only viewed one photograph of the desert camp prior to arriving gave me only a slight idea of what to expect -- at least I knew what the camp itself looked like, but that was it. I was, however, not prepared for life at the desert camp which was to be my home for the next two and a half weeks. Just seeing a photograph of some tents sitting out in the sand did not come close to preparing me for this adventure of a lifetime.

Life at desert camp was like stepping back in time, back into the falconry books I had read as a child. I can remember

seeing photos of hunting parties going out into the desert on camel back and other pictures of Arabian falconers sitting around campfires with beautiful falcons perched all around them, the light from the fire dancing across their feathers, giving them a surreal look. These falcons were, to me, the most glorious creatures I had ever seen. I remember one photograph in particular that has stayed with me until this day. The photo showed a lone falconer standing on the top of a sand dune, holding his falcon, looking out over the vast desert he was hunting. I always thought, how could he possibly find anything in a land such as that? Where would one even start looking? The desert is so big and life there is so scarce. For me, this desert is so far removed from my world, I never thought I would ever come here. But there I was, standing in the desert of my dreams, the desert of my childhood memories, living and breathing in the desert ways, seeing

for myself how one can hunt in this vast desert that is so big, so endless and so unforgiving.

Rewarding experience

The most rewarding part of the experience was the opportunity to participate in this culture on the other side of the world, so different from my daily life in eastern Oregon. Each day, after washing their hands and removing their shoes, everyone would gather in the food tent and sit down on plush pillows, waiting for the food to arrive. It was during these times, with falconers from all over the world sitting together and talking about falconry, telling stories of flights and hunts from the far corners of the world, bringing laughter and smiles to all, that I understood how privileged I was to be a part of this event.

Eating food in the traditional Arab style is somewhat of an adjustment, particularly for someone like me who



Looking skyward at the radio-controlled aircraft with lure

is not used to sitting on the floor. So, with each meal, my past sports related injuries would be there to protest loudly. The food was primarily lamb and rice and rumor has it that we had camel one afternoon. If we did, I couldn't tell any difference. Our meals were laid before us on very large silver trays, heaping over with rice and an entire lamb on top, accompanied by a yogurt sauce used to moisten the rice, as well as plenty of salad greens and fruit. Most took their meals with their hands as is the Arab tradition, myself included, although forks and spoons were available as an option.

The desert camp changed each day with new tents being erected daily and more and more falconers arriving all the time. Initially we had had the entire camp to ourselves and flying our eagles was never anything to be concerned about. The falcon team flew their falcons further out in the desert making any eagle-falcon

contact highly unlikely. But as the official start of the festival grew nearer, with each passing day, the training of both eagles and falcons became more intense and the need to fly all the birds in the practice ring was much more critical. The eagle and falcon teams agreed to a system whereby we would inform all concerned, via hand held radios, as to when any bird was in the air or, heaven forbid, gone missing. This system worked well until desert camp was besieged with non-English speaking falconers who were not aware of the system nor accustomed to asking when they could fly their birds! You can only imagine the scene and the potential train wreck that could have occurred when the eagle team was flying a particularly aggressive and quite agile male golden eagle and suddenly someone released a white gyrfalcon that spotted the same lure the eagle was flying to. Fortunately, disaster was avoided by the

quick reactions of the falconers working the eagle but situations like this were a constant concern, as you may well imagine.

Camel hunt

Excitement was building in camp as the camel hunts were being organized and names were being posted as to which hunting party you got to go on, morning or afternoon. Cordi, my wife, and I were picked to go on the first morning of camel hunts, which meant being at the camel barn at 6:00am, before sun up. Just like all deserts, regardless of where they are in the world, they are hot during the day and quite cold at night. This desert was no exception. That morning we all stood around bundled up in coats watching the camel herd arrive through a thick morning fog. The whole scene had a very "Star Wars" effect to it with camels just appearing out of the



Radio-controlled aircraft with lure

mist wearing brightly colored blankets, many with their entire nose and mouth covered in beautifully braided muzzles. The muzzles were necessary because, we were told, "Camel likes to go everywhere and eat everything, not stay with group. This no let them eat." This is good..... can't have my camel going off on some food searching side trip and get separated from the group!

I was, I admit, just a little hesitant about climbing on the back of a camel. They look somehow unstable and just a little intolerant of humans. They gave me the impression that they would toss their rider off at the slightest excuse. I have spent my entire life around horses so riding was not the issue, there was just something about the way camels act, the males roaring like a lion, all the while baring their long yellow teeth, which was just a little unnerving. And, for me, they were difficult to read. I can read a horse easily enough; I know, for example, when a horse is upset or going to bolt at any second, but with camels I had no clue. Plus, they are so tall, it's a long way to fall! So I knew that if I thought about

riding a camel too much, knowing me, I would not have climbed aboard. So, up I went, with many of my so-called friends all waiting to see if I would take a nose dive into the sand as the camel stood up. You see, camels, probably because they have such long legs or are testing you to see if you are worthy, stand up by abruptly raising their hind ends first, then the front legs come up. This action, if one is not ready, can (and did, for some), send the rider over the top and into the sand face first. This, however, was not my first rodeo, as they say, and although Cordi would argue to the contrary, I do pay attention and so, much to everyone's disappointment, I was ready and all went according to plan. On the other hand, Cordi never gave riding a camel a second thought. She climbed on her camel like she was reliving a past life, guiding her camel around everywhere on her own. I would have gladly guided my camel by myself as well but, sadly, he was tied to the lead camel and, you know, that was just fine by me.

We hunted for three or four hours with success, seeing the second desert

hare taken legally in thirty-six years, the first having been caught by the other hunting party that same morning. The desert hare has been a protected species and is making a dramatic comeback due, in large part, to an extensive breeding project on their behalf. One thing that is to be said about the Emiratis, they will spend the money to get things done. I was, I'm not ashamed to admit, most pleased to dismount my camel -- seems certain parts of my body didn't take so kindly to the hump!

Thinking back about the entire experience I find it difficult to wrap my brain around the whole thing. First of all, just going there was an adventure all on itself. Traveling alone is something I do not do well. The big joke around my household was that I would be lost somewhere in Charles de Gaulle airport, wandering aimlessly from terminal to terminal, never to be seen again. Well, I'm happy to report I made it just fine, thank you. Then there was the whole desert camp scene. Think about it..... living out in the desert with everything set up for one purpose, falconry. And each day the experience grows and takes on unimaginable directions, with more and more falconry. The authors that penned the falconry books I read as a young lad could never in their wildest dreams have envisioned the advancements of falconry on display at the desert camp; remote-controlled airplanes pulling a lure up into the sky with falcons in hot pursuit, flying at the limit of what seemed possible to avoid the speedy falcons; large balloons carrying a lure thousands of feet up in the sky with falcons climbing to small pin dots to claim their prize. All this was a sight to behold, the wonders of the modern sport of falconry on full display. And heck, I haven't even said a word about the festival itself, that's a whole other article on it's own.

I think Cordi summed up our experience in the desert camp nicely when she said: "Here I am, an American woman, riding a camel out in the Arabian desert, hunting houbara, being led by an Emirati falconer on one side and a Pakistani falconer on the other, with all the huge problems in the world, yet we are all here together because of one thing.. a shared passion....the common love of falconry." It is truly the sport of the world.

Participating countries at the festival

Showing just how “international” the festival was.



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Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Belgium
Bosnia & Herzegovina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Canada
Chile
China
Columbia
Croatia
Czech Republic
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Ecuador
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Estonia
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Greece
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Portugal
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Russia
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South Africa
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Ukraine
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USA
Uzbekistan
Wales
Zimbabwe

Nick Kester
Communications Officer



As the season nears its end, the Hawk Board work continues. For those who are planning a quiet summer, spare a thought for those battling to enable you to start hawking again next autumn.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Can you believe it, the laws that govern our sport are over thirty years old? There have been amendments over this period, and it is universally acknowledged that in general wildlife legislation is cumbersome and woefully out-of-date. It is time for a review.

The Law Commission has set itself this task and HB has submitted areas that we believe need addressing; and if you thought thirty years is a long time you should consider the Game Act (governing the open seasons). This is nearly 200 years old! And is also on the agenda. The one specifically excluded is the highly contentious Hunting with Dogs Act.

So here is a list of some of the areas we think need looking at:

1 *Huntable species. Do we ask for a list of falconry specific species that are not included in the game lists or the open general licences? This would simplify our*

applications for quarry specific licences.

2 *Game seasons. Should we seek a change? Start later, finish later, or just extend for falconry? There is very little appetite for this in some quarters of the shooting and gamekeeping world.*

3 *Do we seek formal recognition that except in exceptional circumstances our hawks are not classified as wild?*

4 *Wild take: Remember we still retain the right to ask for this. It might be time to reinforce this.*

5 *Wild disabled? Breeding from, rehabilitation of? This is only partially included in the Act, and there is considerable confusion about it.*

6 *Registration? Is it time to remove it completely?*

7 *Non-native and hybrids. We should include our right to fly such hawks and falcons; otherwise someone will try to ban it.*

This is just a few but we shouldn't get too excited. This is a preliminary consultation and nothing is likely to happen before the next election. Nevertheless we are working on it.

Animal Health (AHVLA)

At the last HB meeting AHVLA announced that they did not expect to have to attend every meeting in the future.

Caroline Rigg who now heads the CITES department has lost a number of staff due to redundancy, and time and money are tight. This we found quite unacceptable as the government had created HB (and funded it initially) because it provided a direct conduit to all users without the cost of personal contact. To say we were disappointed is an understatement! But it was not unexpected. A similar statement had been made at an earlier Sustainable Users Group (SUN) meeting and received an equal amount of dismay.

A quick SUN meeting was convened before the January Joint Liaison Group (all interested NGOs – some not sympathetic) to explore a way forward. AHVLA's tone was more conciliatory and it was agreed that they would always be on hand to answer questions at our meetings and, provided they had advance notice, would happily discuss issues that concerned us. Critical to this is our understanding of the relationship between policy and delivery. It is always best to be in at the discussion of policy rather than waiting for it to become actionable. In all this we stressed that unless we had prior notice of changes or introductions of new policy, we would all

be wasting our time.

A number of issues arose at these two important meetings that are relevant to the hawk keeping community.

- Nevin Hunter (a police officer seconded to AHVLA) is to become the new head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit in March. His current job as head of compliance inside the department will not be replaced by a serving police officer but rather by a civil servant.
- AHVLA are committed to recovering all costs associated with CITES licensing. As a result fees will increase by 25% in October 2012 and recover all costs in October 2014. At current rates an A10 would then cost £64 per specimen. Whether the clutch-based applications that provide a discount will continue is not yet confirmed. For export and import permits, consignment applications may also disappear. (Currently, if you export 10 Gyr falcons to the same location you only pay one fee.) The suggestion is that you will pay full cost for the first raptor shipped and a reduced rate for all subsequent birds going to the same destination. However, none of this is firmed up.

- There are no plans to increase the fees for the remaining species that require registration as this comes under a separate review.
- It was agreed that a new organisational chart be produced and circulated as so many changes in staff had happened it was important we contact the correct person.
- There is a need for new guidance notes on the legislation. Everyone agreed that compliance was better than prosecution. However of the 24 points that an EU working group had raised, only four or five would be addressed by Britain. Other member states would draft their suggested notes and submit them to Brussels. It was agreed that we should a) have an input in the UK drafting and b) know which countries were drafting the others; thus we could encourage other falconry groups to lobby for clear and sympathetic guidance. It is worth remembering that such guidance could be used as defence should the law come knocking so it is critical it is in our favour.

There will be more information on all this in the coming months, but we are always happy to answer questions on what we currently know.

The Return of the Red Kite — another view

The article by Mike Read in issue 87 of the Falconers Magazine gave interesting insights into the recovery of the Red Kite population. But it leaves out the contribution of falconers.

In 1985, the British population was down to about 25 breeding pairs in mid-Wales. Their productivity was seldom more than one chick each, and many nests were robbed by egg-collectors, despite intensive wardening, even by the Ghurkhas. We were breeding various raptors at our farm in Wales at that time, and also, 15 years earlier, had hacked out goshawks in the goshawk re-introduction programme. So I approached the Kite Committee and suggested that the

Nature Conservation Council (now JNCC) took eggs from threatened nests and replaced them with dummies, bringing the real eggs to us for hatching. In 1986 they visited our facility and we showed them what was possible with artificial incubation and rearing. They agreed, and in 1987 season the first kite eggs were delivered by field-workers Tony Cross, Iolo Williams and Dee Doody. Some of the eggs were pretty filthy!

Over the next seven years we hatched or reared 53 Red Kites and all were released to the wild. The project was so successful that soon we ran out of foster nests in Wales and that led to the next stage, which was to establish them in England and Scotland.

Viewing with a wing mirror

Various incidents occurred along the way. One year the field team, using a car wing mirror on a telescopic pole, spotted a very strange egg in the nest of a new pair. The pattern looked familiar. Tony Cross climbed up and retrieved – a tennis ball! The young female, presumably not laying herself, had brought it to the nest and started to incubate it. So Tony replaced it with a Buzzard egg, which eventually hatched. Then we swapped the buzzard chick with a red kite chick from us, so eventually the pair succeeded in fledging a kite chick of their own!

The general plan had been to take one egg from a clutch of two, replacing it with a dummy, so that the kites could hatch their remaining egg, then place a second chick in the nest from the egg that had been artificially incubated. We had a foster-Buzzard to rear the chicks. She was an imprint called 'Beast-that-lurks'. For some reason BTL was nice to me but horrid to anyone else who so much as approached her door. She would wait on the floor to grab them if they opened it. BTL could rear 12 kite chicks a season on a roll on – roll off basis. There were no Cain and Abel squabbles. BTL would feed all the chicks to repletion and then sit on them until next feed time. The result of this was that our chicks were fed well and grew rapidly. But when we came to return a chick to its natural parents at 3-4 weeks old, we found that the original chick was barely half the size. Our chick would have killed it. So we had to do 'musical chairs' with the chicks to get them into matching pairs.



A basket full of Red Kite chicks



Red Kite with young on a nest

It was clear from this that the kites in mid-Wales were under food stress. That is why they could only rear one, poor quality chick. Often they were reduced to feeding rotten lambs' tails that had fallen off the lambs, complete with the rubber ring. Of course this would impact in the gizzard and kill the chicks. Although the kites had hung on in mid-Wales, where there were no game keepers to kill them, the habitat was far from ideal. So it seemed better to increase their range, either from the edges, or to start again in a new area where there was more food available.

As the project became more

successful, more organisations became interested. The RSPB made a film in 1990 and we hatched chicks for the film in replica nests in our lab. Did we get a free copy of the film? No, we had to buy our own for £14!

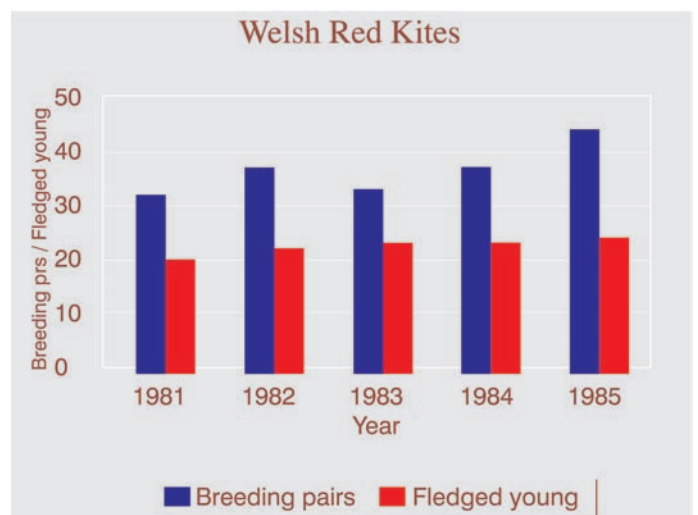
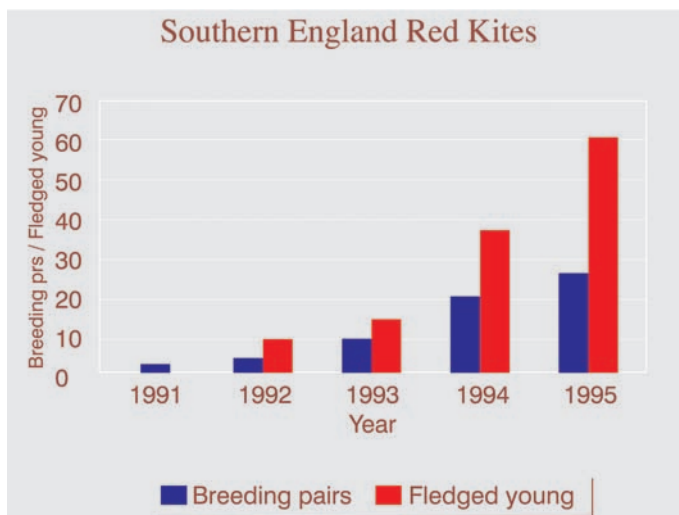
There was a bit of politics going on around this time. The iconic Red Kite had become very emblematic of Wales. The Welsh were not keen to supply kites to the English. Also, as the Welsh kites had been through a genetic bottleneck and were very in-bred, fresh blood was needed. So we cast around to see if any neighbouring countries would donate kites and as a result, a plan was made to

import kites from Spain for the English releases and from Sweden for the Scottish releases, starting in the Black Isle. Chicks bought in from the continent still had to be quarantined before release and I designed a hack pen which could serve both purposes. When the first pen was ready on an estate near Stokenchurch I took two Welsh Kite chicks which were ready for release but had no foster nest available, in the old Cortina and put them into the release pen. So they were the first kites to fly again in England since extermination in Victorian times.

Reduction in food availability

Feeding stations were set up in Wales to help kites through the winter months. At this time there was a clamp down on dead farm stock and farmers had to remove all dead animals and incinerate them. This drastically reduced food availability for scavengers during the hard months. Nowadays the feeding stations have to use butchers meat, which is not a balanced diet for kites and has further implications, but the kites are compensating by attending rubbish dumps!

Of course the releases in England and Scotland were spectacularly successful. With more food around, they often reared three chicks per nest. Soon these chicks were moved on to new release areas. We had kites flying all over the place and the new populations started to link up. By then there were plenty of people and organisations jumping on the band wagon, so I retired from the UK Kite Committee. The project is a success and the work was done. The kites became a multi-million pound jobs gravy



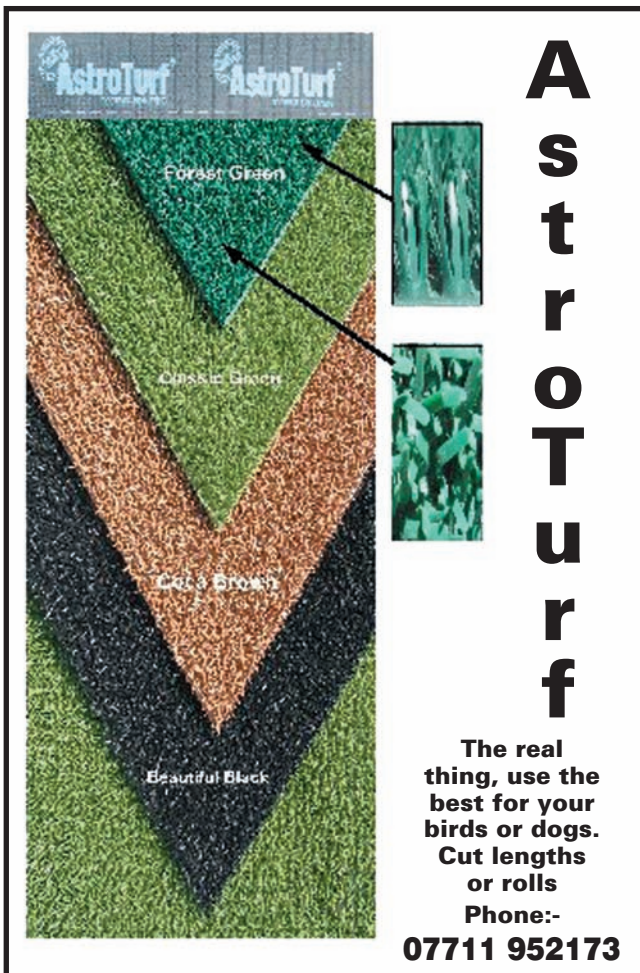


Chick weighing in at 54.8g

train for tourism and conservationists. Now I can look out of my office window across the valley and sometimes see a dozen kites, not to mention buzzards and occasionally a goshawk as well!

By the early 1990s we started work on Saker Falcons. We have put out 5000 artificial nests in Mongolia and this year they had 200 new pairs of Sakers producing over 300 chicks. Also we had new pairs of Kestrels, Upland Buzzards and Ravens. In the case of these birds it was not food that was limiting them, but nest sites. Provide the nest sites and – bang – off they go!

Protection organisations are often good at watching birds and protecting habitats, but few have experience of managing real live birds or eggs. This is their blind spot. Falconers, who live cheek by jowl with their birds, have this managing experience. This is why falconers will always have a contribution to make in re-habilitating and caring for wild raptors.



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Northumberland Crow Falcons



I received the unexpected invitation to visit the Northumberland Crow Falcons in action from Nick Fox before the CLA Game Fair, and accepted immediately by e-mail.

However, the Game Fair was an opportunity to see Nick in person and arrange some dates.

I arrived after the 8 hour drive from Sussex not really sure what I would be doing - although I did know that I wanted to capture some photographs of the falcons actually flying in the surroundings. After breakfast it was clear that I would be handling and flying the falcons and I was pleased I had taken my jacket with all the equipment on it. However, one experience I lacked was using a pole lure! So Peter (the head falconer) and I picked up the imprint male white Gyr, some food and the pole lure. I had just a few practice swings and then the bird was set free. At this point I should mention that all the birds flew without a bell, and wore no jesses at all. This was also a new lesson for me; two lengths of braided nylon hang from the "D-ring" of your glove and the bird is secured by one of these at all times until being slipped for flying.

The objective of using the pole lure is to get the bird to chase the lure for as long a sweep as possible without hitting the bird, a bystander or yourself! I could keep the lure in the air whilst waving the 12 foot modified fishing rod from side to side and trying not to fall over the tussock grass and limestone crags under my feet. Trying to place the lure in front of the large silently approaching Gyr and trail it in front of him was somewhat trickier. But I was encouraged and assisted by Nick's remote voice coming out of the walkie-talkie I carried, and I achieved the "follow through" of the lure on a number of occasions. Two days later I was given a master-class in pole luring, and that's



Gyr falcon on the wing

when I also managed to get some good photographs of the birds.

After a quick lunch, preparations went ahead for the mounted meet. A total of 16 horses and seven car/foot followers attended this Wednesday meet at the nearby farm and we took five falcons with us. On another day there were 11 horses riding out when the birds took four crows - but it meant riding about 8 miles cross country so horses were the only option. Of course as the only remaining legal mounted field sport the flights are arranged to challenge the riders as well as the falcons.

Spotting for crows

The first difference I noted compared to the crow hawking I am used to, is that we were only spotting for pairs of crows; there were no large feeding flocks and very few mixed flocks of corvids about. Once a few crows were spotted, then a falcon was handed up to Nick Fox on horseback where he then rode to take position above the crows. It also surprised me that despite all the activity and the appearance of the falcon, the crows sat tight on the ground. Other riders were placed either below or to

the left or right of where the flight might end.. The first falcon slipped was an experienced female Peregrine x Saker, and she left the fist with purpose directly towards her crow.

After about 500 yards of downhill flight, the falcon threw up and put in a stoop to the crow which tried its best to hide underneath a horse trailer in the corner of the field. The crow lost its fight and as they were nearest, Nick's party went to pick up the crow and the falcon. The falcon was given a small reward, and she would fly again later that day.

The next falcon was then prepared - two transmitters added and jesses removed - and everyone moved to a new location about half a mile away.

The question I hear most of you asking is "are the horses really necessary?". The answer is yes, and no. Yes, because it makes moving about easier - the terrain underfoot is both rocky and boggy, is covered in nettles and thistles in places where it is not cropped by livestock, and some of the flights ended amongst the livestock. Sheep and cattle, the latter having calves at this time of year, are calmer when approached by horses rather than humans alone running

towards their falcon. I was told to keep calm around the cattle particularly. And "no", because there were several flights which ended in a kill being nearer the foot-falconers (i.e. Peter and myself!), and a dramatic one ended by the roadside in a four foot deep gully. We both ran over to the falcon and secured her with the crow. It being her second kill of the day, she was allowed to eat half of it.

Tea time

A short picnic break at about 4 o'clock allowed riders to dismount and horses to graze where they stood. I was feeding one of the falcons after she had had her second crow of the day. Another falcon was prepared, and the party went to yet another location within a mile or so to spot more crows. Planning and the constant use of the walkie-talkies meant there were no delays, and no misunderstandings about what should happen or where anyone was going.

Out of the five good slips that day, three crows were caught, one just got away and one made it to the very few trees that were around the area. There are remarkably few trees of any height, so the crows will often take cover in reed

clumps, thistles, under sheep or cattle, under trailers or other farm machinery, and if pressed hard, they will go into a nook in the dry stone walls. If a crow is marked down in a tight spot, and an un-entered falcon is being flown (there were two), it may be possible to set up a re-flush with some judicial positioning of the people and the slip. For an experienced falcon this is not necessary as she will have taken the crow.

Conversation and returned falcons

With the falcons flown, the entire party returned to the meet site, which had a tea-room onsite for the campers. Hot drinks and a snack were available to everyone whilst conversation bubbled. It was dusk by the time all the falcons had been returned to the mews and put on their shelf perches for the night. For the handling and moving of many birds, I found the loop leashes much quicker than knots, provided of course you are using suitable blocks, or shelf perches. They are safer too if you have a falcon that develops the knack of untying knots – not many do, but it can prove fatal if a bird flies off with its equipment still attached.

In two days time there was to be the BBQ for the landowners and members of the Northumberland Crow Falconers. All hands present were enlisted to clear the outbuildings, and set them up as food bars, drinks bar, seating areas, food tables, and decorate with spruce



Chanceling falcon

branches, balloons and candles. This was much harder work than flying the birds!

For those two days there was no mounted meet, falcons were either being flown at crows and we drove to various locations or they were exercised to the pole lure depending on their weight. At least two more crows were caught and

several got away to trees in new conifer plantations. I heard my first grouse calling in a small moor, but did not see it. At one stop below Hadrian's Wall whilst looking for crows, a hare was spotted apparently in a pointing pose. When it moved, it showed to be a lame hare, which had probably been hit by a car and survived.



The weather vane

Erecting a weather vane

One of the tasks before the BBQ was to install the newly painted and very appropriate weather vane. After the falcons had been admired by the guests and discussed on the weathering, they were put into the mews hooded, so they could still be seen while diners sat around them and socialized.

The small band of musicians arrived and set up ready for the dancing, country dancing with a caller. All the locals participated with enthusiasm, but I had learned enough new skills and was enrolled to serve the punch to the thirsty revelers.

I thanked my hosts the next day for a very interesting and rewarding experience, and started the long trip south planning to make and use a pole lure.

George Edward Lodge Trust

The George Edward Lodge Trust was set up in 2007 to further awareness of the life and work of this outstanding artist and naturalist. The Trust will build up a directory of artwork and artefacts of the artist with a view to making it available to those wishing to gain a greater understanding of him and his artwork and techniques. It will build an historical picture of falconry in the 19th and early 20th centuries based particularly upon the artwork, records and diaries of George Edward Lodge, but also expanding to incorporate other sources as these become available.



George Lodge in his Camberley studio 1947.

George Lodge was born at Horncastle in Lincolnshire. He was an accomplished taxidermist, beginning with his first subject, an owl, at the age of twelve. As a student at the Lincoln School of Art he was awarded fourteen prizes for drawing and later became an expert wood engraver.

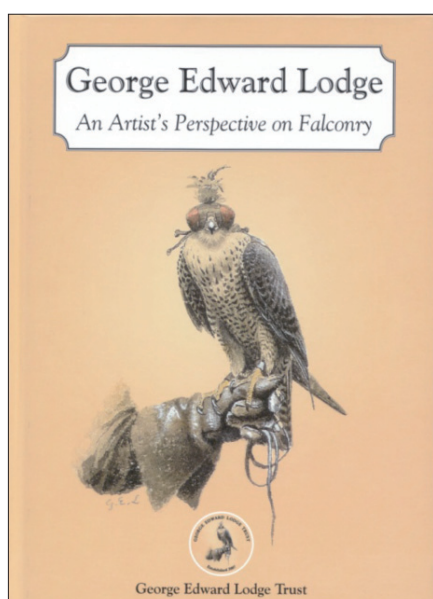
As a young man he travelled widely, visiting Ceylon, Japan and the West Indies. A great sportsman, he particularly enjoyed the annual visits to Scotland and to the salmon rivers of Norway, from which countries he gathered much material for his work on raptors. He was a keen falconer and spent the last part of his life in a house at Camberley in Surrey, which he named, appropriately, Hawk House.

Lodge wrote his only book 'Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist' at the age of eighty-five. He was, however, a prolific illustrator, best remembered for his superb illustrations for Dr. Bannerman's 12 volumes of 'The Birds of the British Isles'.

The George Edward Lodge Trust has been recently established to encourage awareness of the life and work of George Lodge.

For more information:

www.georgeedwardlodgetrust.co.uk



George Edward Lodge:
An Artist's Perspective on Falconry

This book is the first to be published by the George Edward Lodge Trust. 'Compiled to educate the non-falconer, and with the falconer in mind . . .' the book is dedicated to the late Thomas Mann of Hyde Hall, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire – 'with whom George Lodge found falconry and friendship'. The articles and extracts are chosen to illustrate the life and work of the artist George Lodge, and especially his association with falconry. It includes, in full, E.B. Michell's article, 'MODERN FALCONRY', from *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 1885-1886, which George Lodge illustrated. Also a number of pieces by and about Lodge, some of them previously unpublished.

ISBN: 9780956294609

George Lodge with gyr-falcon, 1936.

Price: £15.00 + £3.00 P&P

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Extract from George Lodge's autobiography

Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist

VI. EAGLES AND OSPREYS

The golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetus chrysaetus* L.) is still fairly numerous in the Highlands of Scotland, but the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaetus albicilla* L.) is no longer a resident breeding species in Britain. One or two stragglers are seen almost every year; they are probably Norwegian birds on passage. The last resident example of this fine bird was an albino specimen which lived on North Roe, one of the Shetland islands, for about thirty years. Originally it had a normal-coloured mate, and bred for the last time in 1908. They generally used the same nest year after year, but at one time, Meade-Waldo told me, they had another nesting site on the island. He remembered seeing the nest but at that time it was occupied by a pair of peregrines.

My personal experiences of this eagle are given from my diary:

"June 28, 1914. North Roe. Meade-Waldo, Ogilvie-Grant and self, with James Hay the watcher, went to where the sea eagle lives. We saw her from a



George Lodge with gyr-falcon, 1936



Albino White-tailed Sea Eagle, North Roe, Shetland. Oil on canvas, 42 x 60 inches.

long way off, like a white spot on the cliff below the old nest which is still there on a 500-foot cliff. "She was very wild and flew off and away and we did not see her again. She is quite white and looks as white as a gull while flying. This shelter was a big crack or chimney, with a split in the side opposite the entrance, from where we could look across to the nest which was about 100 feet from the top of the cliff. I spent a time here making an oil sketch of the nesting cliff; but it was a horrid cramped position and a bad afternoon, blowing half a gale of wind and driving thick drizzling mist across. I was fairly well sheltered and worked for one and a half hours, but was then too cold and cramped to continue so went home in the rain."

"June 30, 1914. Very windy. Went again to see the eagle. She was not in sight when we got there. It was too windy to paint so I made a pencil sketch of the rock in the immediate vicinity of the nest. While so engaged a hoodie crow continually mobbed something round the corner where we had not view, as it was shut in by the rocks on our left. Meade-

Waldo and Ogilvie-Grant therefore went out to the top of the cliffs to investigate, and out flew the eagle mobbed by two or three hoodies. I had a very short view of her as she passed across my crack opening at a distance of about a hundred yards. I noticed that her primaries were not white but appeared to be light brown.

The nest seems to be a mass of rubbish and looks just like the surrounding rocks. We could see no trace of sticks, which lack would probably be due to wear and tear and stress of weather. However, I got material for a picture and the wild weather if eminently in keeping with the subject."

"July 10, 1922. North Roe. Meade-Waldo and I went for a long ramble with James Hay the watcher. We made for the Red Banks, the old nesting site of the albino sea eagle which has not been seen by Hay since 1918. On the way there we were bunkered by a burn in spate, up which we had to go for two miles before we could cross. We turned downstream again and went to the old place where I

made the sketches in 1914. There is now not a vestige of the nest to be seen."

"July 13, 1922. Mr Ratter, the bird photographer at Lerwick, told us he had heard of a pair of sea eagles having been seen at two places in the Shetlands this spring, one of these places being Muckle Roe and the other Sandness, farther south on the west coast. He also introduced us to a young man whose father has seen two sea eagles at Ollaberry this year; also that he had heard that the old white sea eagle of the Red Banks was shot in 1918 by an old man. What had been done with the body he either could not or would not tell us. This date coincides with the time James Hay ceased to see anything of it."

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Drag Lures and Ventilation Units



Mechanical lure system

My last article on falconry innovations concerned the triangular shaped swivel and, always on the lookout for ideas to improve the welfare and conditioning of our raptors, I offer for your perusal two items that I have added to my falconry arsenal and have already field tested for the coming season.

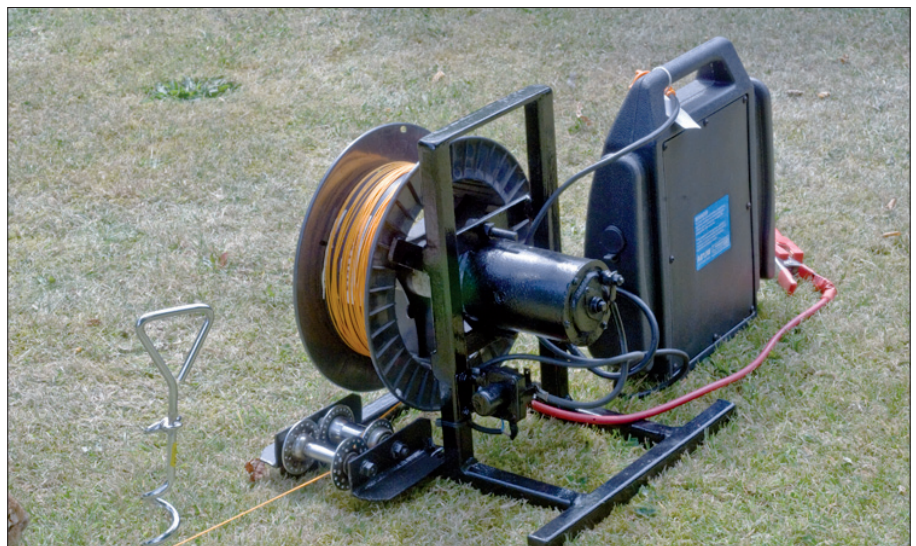
The first of these concerns the mechanical lure drag system and while the idea is not new and a few have been used for some time, the system still remains little known to most falconers and few, if any, are in commercial production in the UK. For someone like myself, who trains his raptors alone with nobody to help to pull ground lures, the mechanical lure drag system is an absolute Godsend and I wonder how I managed without one. For years, I have pulled ground lures by running as fast as I can, dragging the contraption behind me at nothing like warp speed. It is not physically possible for a human to pull a

lure at the same speed in which a rabbit or hare can accelerate, so at best, the latter method is a poor substitute. Using a towing vehicle or a horse has been the accepted method for some time, but this method does require the use of two or more people. The drag lure machine

eliminates both problems. I can now drag the lure at incredibly fast speeds, do it alone and what is more, by placing pegs in relevant points, I can replicate the natural twists and turns that wild quarry so cleverly employs whilst being pursued. Thus a lifelike and more natural looking lure comes into being. This has made all the difference to my hawking with Golden Eagles.

Home grown

However, the mechanical lure drag system is still largely a homemade enterprise. Indeed, my own machine is one of four made by my good friend and eagle falconer Geoff Surtees. Geoff had the frameworks manufactured by a friend and then set about fixing car starter units, which he obtained from the local car breakage yard, solenoids, two jump start leads and wheel drums to take the line. He also added a system of two runners to prevent the line from flying off the wheel and causing any amount of tangles. A switch was then added to control the speed of the lure. All that was then



Mechanical lure system ready to go

required was a method of powering the finished unit and this can be accomplished in at least two ways. The first is by using a twelve-volt car battery, but this can be cumbersome. The second is by using a car jump starter unit, which can be purchased at reasonable cost from many commercial outlets, mine for example came from Maplins. I also purchased one of those heavy-duty spiral dog spikes in order to wind the dragline at its furthest point and so because there are ever increasing levels of drag being created by the extending length of the line, some substantial fixation point is required. As soon as all the required bits and pieces were all in place, I took the unit out and field-trialled it. I couldn't believe the speed with which the lure, a dead hare, rocketed over the ground. The machine even drags carcasses the size of a Roe Deer! As aforementioned, with the fixation of various round-topped pegs at strategic points, I now had the means to persuade the lure to jink, twist and turn, as would wild quarry. Although I still use rope training to build up pectoral muscle, the lure machine certainly enhances the all-important footing techniques. The

only difficulty with these machines is obtaining one in the first place. As far as I am aware, most of the machines in use are virtually home made with no companies producing them at anything like commercial level. Perhaps there is a market niche here for they can be used with any hawk that chases ground game, not just eagles.

Ventilation in travel boxes

The second piece of equipment concerns a ventilation system for raptor travel boxes. Ever since the 2009 Falconry Festival, I have been considering ways of ventilating travel boxes, for the air soon becomes stale on long journeys or field meets. I had experimented with small fans obtained from computer towers, using a flat piece of black plastic suspended below the hole cut to house the fan, in order to help block out the light and diffuse the airflow. I was still fiddling with this idea when Alan Walker of the BFC North East region came back to the BFC Eagle Group marquee at the 2011 Falconry Fair clutching a small brown box. We all peered inside to discover a compact little ventilation system for

use with travel boxes. I saw the merit of this unit immediately and went with Alan to the manufacturer who had a stall nearby. The manufacturer was Duncan Kingscott, of KTB travel boxes, who demonstrated the use of this equipment by using a smoke test in a specially made transparent plastic replica of a travel box. The outlet section containing the extractor fan was fixed below the perch and the control unit was fastened to the exterior of the box itself. Another version comes with the unit actually embedded inside the specially made travel box, but as we already had travel boxes, the aforementioned unit held our immediate interest. In a mere three or four minutes, the smoke had vanished, so the unit was effectively changing the air of the entire travel box every four minutes or so. This is exactly what I had been looking for and purchased a unit on the spot. They weren't cheap, but how do you quantify the welfare of your bird? To me, my eagle is priceless and as such I will do anything to improve his welfare and would hope that most falconers think likewise.

All that is required to install the unit is to drill a 44mm hole beneath the perch and then attach the fan unit to the side, front or rear (your choice) of the travel box with specially provided sticky-back fixation points. If required, the fan unit can be more permanently fixed by using a sealant, but in fact, the fit in my view is quite tight enough. By fixing the unit beneath the perch at one side, you can avoid contamination by mutes splashing the unit, which would certainly be the case if the unit were to be fitted in the front or rear of the box. The unit also comes with a 12-volt cigarette lighter plug, which fits neatly into a car cigarette lighter socket. However, I have opted to use the aforementioned car jump starter unit, which also comes with a 12-volt cigarette lighter socket, so the car jump starter now performs two functions. Knowing the air is being changed every four minutes or so by dragging in ambient air from the top and extracting it below has certainly eased my mind considerably about build-up of stale air and moisture from travelling long distances to field meetings. So thank you Geoff and thank you Duncan for easing and improving my eagle falconry. One thing is for sure and that is falconry is certainly becoming more technical by the year.



Circular ventilation system in situ

Rob Palmer – Falconer and Photographer



Hovering Kestrel



Redtail homing in on Cotton Tail



Harris Hawk on Cotton Tail rabbit

I got my start in both of these life-long passions when I was twelve years old. Like any other kid during those times, I would go for “bike hikes” along canal trails in my hometown of Littleton, Colorado USA. We were always looking for stuff to investigate, to climb trees, wade in ponds and discover anything. One day, I was with a couple friends biking along the highline canal and we saw a bird fly into a hole in a tree. So, like any adventurous kid, I climbed up the tree to investigate. I got almost all the way up and a young American Kestrel bolted off a nearby branch but it could not fly. It just did a soft crash landing in the grass below. I jumped/fell out of the tree as fast as I could, probably twenty feet or so. I took the little fellow home and that was the start of my falconry career. I found out what to feed him and when he was old enough to fly (just two or three days later), I let him go. What was so cool, is he came back, and back, and back every evening to perch on my bedpost in my



room. My mom gave me a camera for my birthday (a Polaroid “Swinger” the one that develops prints in 60 seconds) and I was hooked on photography also.

For three months my kestrel, Pete, would fly around the neighborhood and always come back to get food I would put out for him and sleep on my bedpost. It was a year to remember. In October of that year, Pete flew away but memory of him was entrenched forever. The following year, I got two kestrels, Kila and FeFe – they were more independent than Pete but still a blast. When I was 15, I got my first Great Horned Owl, Charlie. I got him younger than Pete and he imprinted on me. I remember him terrorizing the neighborhood as he flew around in the evening scaring the kids although he never attacked. He would land on my head and sit on my handlebars

as I delivered the early morning Sunday newspaper. He followed my mom and dad on their evening walks from house to house. He was a wonderful addition to the family and everyone loved him. Unfortunately, he was killed landing on a transformer in the rain and it was a tragic moment that I will always remember.

Throughout my teenage years, I had a number of raptors, including a Screech Owl, a Swainson’s Hawk and a Red Tailed Hawk. I also continued taking photos of these birds and everything else. As a sophomore in high school, I became the High School Yearbook Photographer but my passion was always flying and photographing raptors.

For the next 30 years, I continued as a falconer and photographer but not professionally. I spent loads of time doing both and making money as a teacher

and a product manager to pay the bills. I didn’t get into serious photography until 2003 when the age of digital was upon us. I knew I needed to get some serious high speed camera equipment to capture raptors in flight so I bought a Canon 1D body and a 500 mm Canon lens. \$10,000.00 worth of equipment, some serious money for anyone. Since then, I have the same lens but lots of different camera bodies as the digital revolution has progressed. I currently shoot with a Canon 1D Mark IV.

I have also been flying lots of falcons in the last 30 years, my current bird is a 2 year old female Peregrine Falcon. A high flyer and a very accomplished duck dispatcher. She has also caught an Anhinga (also known as a Snakebird or Darter), a Cattle Egret and a Bittern all of which were not the intended quarry.

Although taking photos of falconers' birds is very rewarding, I still love taking photos of wild raptors the most.

Since 2007, I have been a full time wildlife photographer and workshop leader and make my sole living off of this not so lucrative business but I definitely will not change my job in the foreseeable future. For me, life is about the present and I cannot imagine living more presently than taking photographs to capture that moment and practising falconry.

Right: Eagle and Starling

Below: Snowy Owl



Some of my photography accomplishments are below:

- Goldeneye Family, 2005 Wild Bird Magazine, Winner, Water Bird Category
- Hovering Kestrel, 2005 National Wildlife Magazine, Winner, Bird Category
- Pronghorn Jumping in Snow, 2007 Nature's Best Magazine, Grand Prize Winner
- Eagle and Blackbird, 2009 BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year, Birds Category
- Eagle and Starling, 2009 National Wildlife Magazine, Grand Prize Winner
- Battling Eagles, 2009 Audubon Magazine, Grand Prize Winner

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STOLEN x 4

BREF	RING	SPECIES
66839	?8PB0?	HARRIS HAWK
68187	?2400?	GOSHAWK
74614	?2944?	HARRIS HAWK
88205	?8540?	HARRIS HAWK

REUNITED x 129

SPECIES	Count
AMERICAN KESTREL	1
BARN OWL	16
COMMON BUZZARD	2
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	4
GOSHAWK	8
GYR HYBRID	10
HARRIS HAWK	43
INDIAN EAGLE OWL	4
LANNER FALCON	2
PEREGRINE FALCON	7
PEREGRINE HYBRID	13
RED-TAILED HAWK	6
SAKER FALCON	4
SAKER HYBRID	1
SIBERIAN EAGLE OWL	1
SNOWY OWL	2
SPARROWHAWK	2
SPECTACLED OWL	1
TURKEY VULTURE	1
URAL OWL	1

LOST x 28

BREF	RING	SPECIES	AREA LOST
52579	?0471?	BARN OWL	SR4
59805	?9MC9?	BARN OWL	WR2
62003	?6055?	BARN OWL	CB1
86509	?2506?	BARN OWL	NG31
86834	?8256?	BARN OWL	WN2
87027	?2640?	BARN OWL	GL15
87970	?CHIP?	COMMON BUZZARD	RG10

58063	?5CNX?	GYR/SAKER FALCON	GL4
82148	?7WHC?	GYR/SAKER FALCON	BL8
83430	?8LBP?	GYR/SAKER FALCON	WA7
88084	?3WDA?	GYR/SAKER FALCON	L33
9826	?8WS9?	HARRIS HAWK	RG9
44186	?2712?	HARRIS HAWK	WS7
51410	?5105?	HARRIS HAWK	DN22
56747	?5615?	HARRIS HAWK	LN11
59353	?8809?	HARRIS HAWK	BT11
61482	?5971?	HARRIS HAWK	PE23
74873	?7300?	HARRIS HAWK	NE13
76821	?4583?	HARRIS HAWK	BT6
85777	?8313?	HARRIS HAWK	SM4
87676	?5266?	HARRIS HAWK	HP3
88184	?VA30?	HOBBY	S75
31445	?4RPR?	KESTREL	SY7
66195	?6DMB?	LONG-EARED OWL	SY21
66776	?1322?	PEREGRINE FALCON	AB35
81186	?7MAR?	PEREGRINE FALCON	BS11
88372	?9MJO?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID	GL1
62508	?5859?	RED-TAILED HAWK	LN6

FOUND x 11

BREF	RING	SPECIES	AREA FOUND
78547	?7493?	BARN OWL	LA14
21966	?2202?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	SK9
39741	?6535?	HARRIS HAWK	CW5
55944	?5823?	HARRIS HAWK	SY13
70242	?6810?	HARRIS HAWK	SG18
75473	?3401?	HARRIS HAWK	NR32
88030	?0MIK?	HARRIS HAWK	RG10
88183	?7010?	HARRIS HAWK	BR8
88350	BA5	HARRIS HAWK	BA5
88111	?7SWD?	KESTREL	IP25
37921	?3769?	RED-TAILED HAWK	SA11

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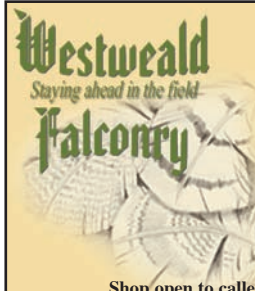
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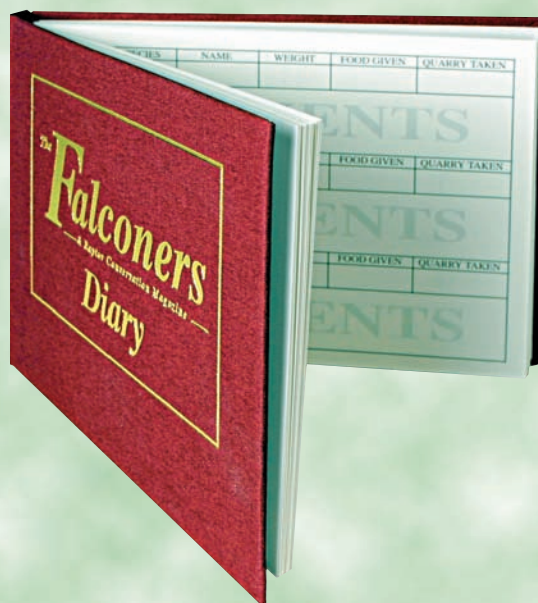
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